

HB 251: Absentee ballots available 20 days instead of 30

House State Administration, Rm 455

January 28, 2013 @ 9 a.m.

Lisa Kimmet, SOS Deputy for Elections and Government Services

Testimony

- The Secretary of State respectfully opposes House Bill 251, as it limits late registration by requiring individuals who register in the first 10 days of the late registration period to return to the county election office, or location designated by the county election administrator, a second time to receive a ballot.
- Additionally, the word "availability" as used in MCA 13-2-304(c), could be interpreted differently in each county, causing inconsistencies in election administration.
- Since absentee ballots would still have to be available 45 days before a federal Primary or General election to voters covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act, it is logical to assume that counties would have at least a small supply of ballots available in the days leading up to the election.
- Since the bill does not prohibit counties from making those ballots available to voters before the proposed 20-days before the election, there's the possibility that some voters would receive their ballots earlier than voters in their neighboring counties.
- We are concerned about decreasing the amount of time to process ballots by at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the time. Decreasing the absentee return period by 10 days would exponentially increase the burden on counties to process returned ballots in a shortened time period.
- The shortened time frame to process ballots similarly decreases the time frame for resolving problems with ballots. An important component of absentee ballots is being able to resolve address issues to ensure that everyone who chooses to vote by absentee ballots is able to.
- We have discussed our concerns with the clerks, and if amendments to address our concerns are offered and passed, we believe we can support House Bill 251.